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INFO OCT-01 ISO-00 CCO-00 SSO-00 NSCE-00 /004 R

66011

DRAFTED BY: ARA/PAN:ENADEAU

APPROVED BY: ARA/PAN:ENADEAU

S/S:LMACFARLANE

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O 312223Z DEC 75 ZFF4

FM SECSTATE WASHDC

TO USDEL SECRETARY IMMEDIATE

C O N F I D E N T I A L STATE 305628 TOSEC 250113

FOLLOWING REPEAT PANAMA 07997 ACTION SECSTATE INFO

BOGOTA CARACAS GUATEMALA KINGSTON MANAGUA MEDELLIN MEXICO SAN JOSE

SAN SALVADOR TEGUCIGALPA PANCANAL USCINCSO DTD 30 DEC

QTE

C O N F I D E N T I A L PANAMA 7997

E.O. 11652: GDS

TAGS: PFOR, PN, CU

SUBJECT: TORRIJOS VISIT TO CUBA: ASSESSMENT FROM PANAMA

SUMMARY: THIS MESSAGE OFFERS EMBASSY'S ANALYSIS OF TORRIJOS' GOALS IN MAKING HIS JANUARY 10-15, 1976 TRIP TO CUBA, ASSESSMENT OF TRIP'S IMPACT ON UNITED STATES-PANAMA RELATIONS IN GENERAL, AND ON CANAL TREATY NEGOTIATIONS IN PARTICULAR, AND WHAT THE UNITED STATES CAN DO TO INFLUENCE TORRIJOS' HANDLING OF HIMSELF AND HIS STATEMENTS WHILE IN CUBA. EMBASSY'S JUDGMENT IS THAT TORRIJOS WILL SEEK TO PARLAY HIS STATE VISIT TO HAVANA, THE ANTICIPATED MAMMOTH RECEPTION TO BE ACCORDED HIM THERE, AND THE ATTENDANT PUBLICITY SURROUNDING HIS APPEARANCES TO (1) ENHANCE AND MAGNIFY HIS SELF-IMAGE AS A HEMISPHERIC AND THIRD WORLD LEADER, (2) TEMPORARILY ALLEVIATE CRITICISM OF HIM AND OF HIS CURRENT POLICIES FROM LEFTIST ELEMENTS IN PANAMA, AND (3) INCREASE WORLDWIDE AWARENESS OF THE CANAL ISSUE AND
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PANAMA'S "JUST CAUSE". TORRIJOS' PERCEPTION OF PROSPECTS FOR TREATY NEGOTIATIONS WILL BE THE SINGLE MOST IMPORTANT FACTOR IN MODERATING OR EXACERBATING THE TONE AND CONTENT OF HIS REMARKS VIS-A-VIS THE UNITED STATES WHILE IN CUBA. WE HAVE

SENSITIZED TORRIJOS DIRECTLY AND THROUGH ADVISERS TO EXPECT SOME ADVERSE REACTION IN THE UNITED STATES, AND HE IS AWARE OF PROBLEM THAT VISIT CREATES FOR US. FOR HIM, HOWEVER, THE POTENTIAL POLITICAL GAINS TO BE DERIVED FROM ENHANCING HIS HEMISPHERIC IMAGE AND FROM COUNTERING DOMESTIC LEFTIST CRITICISM MAY OUTWEIGH ANY CAVEATS WE CAN TENDER. WHILE HIS PRIMARY AUDIENCE WILL BE THE PANAMANIAN PUBLIC, HE IS ALSO INTERESTED IN MAXIMUM PUBLICITY ABROAD AND HAS INVITED SEVERAL U.S. JOURNALISTS TO ACCOMPANY HIM. A SUCCESSFUL TRIP FROM TORRIJOS' STANDPOINT SHOULD AFFORD HIM AN EXTRA MEASURE OF DOMESTIC STABILITY AND CONSEQUENT SELF-CONFIDENCE FOR ACCEPTING ACCOMMODATIONS IN THE CANAL TREATY NEGOTIATIONS. END SUMMARY.

1. INCREASED INTERNATIONAL STATURE. THROUGH HIS FREQUENT TRAVELS, AND HIS AT TIMES COMBATIVE, AT TIMES PATIENT, STATEMENTS ON PANAMA, HER STATUS, AND HER "CAUSE", TORRIJOS HAS CREATED IN SOME PANAMANIAN MINDS AT LEAST AN IMAGE OF HIMSELF AS A HEMISPHERIC, IF NOT INDEED, THIRD WORLD FIGURE. HIS VISIT TO CUBA WILL PLAY TO THAT IMAGE. HE IS EXPECTING A FULL-SCALE CROWD TURNOUT FROM HIS HOSTS, AND WE SHARE THAT EXPECTATION. FURTHER, TORRIJOS IS NOT JUST HEAD OF GOVERNMENT HERE, BUT ALSO SUPREME REVOLUTIONARY LEADER. THE Juxtaposition of that facet of his position to this hemisphere's revolutionary par excellence will not be lost on TORRIJOS, ON ANY OF HIS AUDIENCES, OR ON FIDEL CASTRO. CUBA'S REVOLUTION WILL BE COMPARED TO THE "PANAMANIAN REVOLUTION". AND WHILE THE MANY SIMILARITIES BETWEEN THE TWO NATIONS' HISTORIES, ESPECIALLY WITH RESPECT TO THE INFLUENCE AND INTERFERENCE OF THE UNITED STATES ON BOTH, WILL NOT PASS UNREMARKED, WE UNDERSTAND TORRIJOS' PRESS COORDINATOR WILL POINT OUT TO JOURNALISTS THE OBVIOUS DIFFERENCES IN THE TWO REVOLUTIONS. THAT THE TWO COUNTRIES HAVE SOUGHT SEPARATE PATHS TO REVOLUTION AND TORRIJOS HAS SOUGHT A "PANAMANIAN ASPIRIN FOR PANAMA'S HEADACHE" WILL BE EMPHASIZED.

2. NEVERTHELESS, THE HEADY ATMOSPHERE WE FORESEE IN HAVANA
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WOULD BE INTOXICATING TO EVEN MORE SOBER LEADERS. TORRIJOS EXALTED, RAISES PANAMA IN ITS OWN ESTIMATION AND BROADCASTS ITS CANAL "CAUSE" BEFORE THE INTERNATIONAL EYE. IN ADDITION TO THE PUBLICITY THE TRIP WILL RECEIVE, TORRIJOS HAS INDICATED TO AMBASSADOR THAT HE INTENDS TO ENCOURAGE CASTRO TO STRENGTHEN HIS LINKS WITH LATIN AMERICA. REPORTEDLY HE WILL BEAR THIS MESSAGE ON BEHALF OF THE PRESIDENTS OF COSTA RICA, COLOMBIA AND VENEZUELA. FINALLY, ONE OF TORRIJOS' STATED OBJECTIVES FOR THIS TRIP IS TO FORMALLY INVITE THE CUBAN PREMIER TO NEXT JUNE'S CONFERENCE OF LATIN AMERICAN HEADS OF STATE, THE AMPHICTYONIC CONGRESS, FOR WHICH PANAMA IS HOST. (WE UNDERSTAND CASTRO HAS ALREADY TOLD PANAMA HE WILL ATTEND THE CONFERENCE.) THIS CONFERENCE WOULD FURTHER CUBA'S ACCEPT-

BILITY AS RESTORED MEMBER, EVEN IF NOT COMPLETELY IN GOOD
STANDING, OF THE LATIN AMERICAN COMMUNITY.

3. IMPACT ON DOMESTIC CRITICS IN PANAMA. THE PRESTIGE AND
PUBLICITY TORRIJOS WILL HARVEST FROM HIS VISIT NOT
ONLY WILL AID HIS PERCEIVED STANDING IN LATIN AMERICA AND
ELSEWHERE, BUT, MORE IMPORTANTLY, WILL HELP HIM MATERIALLY ON
THE DOMESTIC SCENE. THE LENGTH OF THE NEGOTIATING PROCESS, THE
UNRESOLVED DIFFICULTIES ON A NUMBER OF TREATY ISSUES,
HINTS OF COMPROMISE BY PANAMA'S NEGOTIATORS, UNITED
STATES ELECTORAL SENSITIVITIES, AND RECENT POLICY AND PER-
SONNEL CHANGES IN THE GOP TO REASSURE THE BUSINESS COMMUNITY
HAVE CREATED TENSION BETWEEN TORRIJOS AND LEFTIST ELEMENTS
HERE. TRANQUILITY IN PANAMA'S DOMESTIC POLITICS DURING THE
CANAL TREATY NEGOTIATING PROCESS DEPENDS TO CONSIDERABLE
DEGREE UPON THE CONTINUATION OF SUPPORT FOR TORRIJOS FROM
THE MODERATE LEFT, AND THE ACQUIESCENCE OF THE
RADICALS. THE JOURNEY TO HAVANA, THEREFORE, WILL BE CAST
AS SOME FORM OF RECOMPENSE TO THESE GROUPS AND WILL BRIGHTEN
HIS IMAGE AS A REVOLUTIONARY LEADER. IT WILL BE
PERCEIVED HERE AS IN LINE WITH PANAMA'S PUBLIC POLICY OF
ERASING ITS FORMER IMAGE OF "DEPENDENCE" ON THE UNITED STATES,
AND WILL BE WELCOME BALM TO THOSE ELEMENTS WHOSE ESTIMATION
OF TORRIJOS HAS BEEN ABRADED BY HIS RECENT SERIES OF "ZAGS"
RIGHTWARDS. TORRIJOS HIMSELF ESTIMATED RECENTLY IN CON-
VERSATION WITH AMBASSADOR, THAT THE CUBA VISIT MAY "BUY" HIM SIX
MONTHS OF PEACE FOR THE NEGOTIATIONS. JUST HOW MUCH TIME AND HOW
MUCH OF A "BUY" TORRIJOS WILL GAIN THROUGH THIS TRIP REMAINS
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TO BE SEEN, BUT NO ONE DOUBTS THAT THE TRIP WILL BE USEFUL
TO TORRIJOS IN COUNTERING PRESSURE FROM HIS RESTIVE CRITICS
ON THE LEFT.

4. TREATY NEGOTIATIONS: THE HAVANA PLATFORM. CERTAINLY ONE
GOAL OF THE TRIP WILL BE TO GAIN PUBLICITY FOR PANAMA'S
CAUSE IN THE UNITED STATES, AND WE UNDERSTAND TORRIJOS HAS
INVITED A NUMBER OF U.S. JOURNALISTS TO ACCOMPANY HIM. BUT
HOW HE WILL CHARACTERIZE THE PROGRESS AND TENOR OF CANAL
NEGOTIATIONS IN HAVANA IS OBVIOUSLY DIRECTLY RELATED TO THE
COURSE OF THE NEGOTIATIONS, THEIR NEAR-TERM PROSPECTS OF
SIGNIFICANT PROGRESS, AND HOW HE WILL JUDGE IT BEST TO
PRESSURE OR ENCOURAGE THE UNITED STATES TO CONCLUDE A TREATY
SATISFACTORY TO HIM AND TO PANAMA. THE UNITED STATES HAS
INDICATED TO HIM THAT NO TREATY IS LIKELY TO BE SUBMITTED FOR
RATIFICATION IN 1976. HE HAS ACCEPTED THAT PUBLICLY, BUT
THE ABSENCE OF VISIBLE NEGOTIATING PROGRESS GIVES RISE TO
DOMESTIC POLITICAL PROBLEMS FOR HIM. WE HAVE REITERATED TO
HIM HOW TOUCH OUR PUBLIC, BUT MORE IMPORTANTLY, CONGRESSIONAL
REACTION TO HIS VISIT COULD BE. NEVERTHELESS HIS PERCEPTION
OF PROGRESS IN THE NEGOTIATIONS WILL BE THE PRIME
DETERMINANT OF HIS DECISION OF WHETHER, AND HOW, TO PRESSURE

US, DESPITE HIS REALIZATION OF THE PERILS OF DOING SO FROM SUCH A SENSITIVE PODIUM. WE ARE CONVINCED, HOWEVER, THAT TORRIJOS WILL NOT BE ADDRESSING THE DOMESTIC UNITED STATES AUDIENCE PRIMARILY. HIS CHIEF CONCERNS WILL BE TO MANIFEST PANAMA'S NEW STATURE, AND, HIS OWN, BEFORE LATIN AMERICA AND THE PANAMANIAN PEOPLE. ANY EFFORTS TO SENSITIZE HIM TO OUR NEEDS MUST BE BALANCED AGAINST THE PRESSURES HE WEIGHS FROM PANAMA AND FROM AN INTERNATIONAL CONSTITUENCY WHICH HAS BEEN SUPPORTIVE OF PANAMA'S ASPIRATIONS OVER THE CANAL ISSUE.

5. WHAT CAN WE EXPECT? EIGHTY PEOPLE REPORTEDLY WILL ACCOMPANY TORRIJOS ON THE TRIP. ABOUT 60 OF THESE WILL BE PANAMANIAN FROM ALL WALKS OF LIFE. REPORTEDLY A MAJORITY OF THE 60 PERSONS WILL BE MODERATES AND CONSERVATIVES. THE OTHER 20 MEMBERS OF THE PARTY WILL BE JOURNALISTS. THE PANAMANIAN EXPECT TO RECEIVE A MASSIVE AND FRIENDLY RECEPTION IN CUBA, WITH PERHAPS A MILLION PEOPLE IN THE INITIAL CROWD. CASTRO WILL HAIL TORRIJOS AS A FELLOW FIGHTER IN THEIR NATIONS' SHARED STRUGGLE TO DEVELOP ECONOMICALLY, BREAK THE POWER OF THE ENTRENCHED OLIGARCHY, AND CHART

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AN INDEPENDENT COURSE IN FOREIGN POLICY--WITH NO DOUBT A FAIRLY POINTED REFERENCE TO ONE FREE FROM UNITED STATES DOMINATION. IT GOES WITHOUT SAYING THAT THE "REVOLUTIONARY" ASPECTS OF TORRIJOS' REGIME WILL RECEIVE STAR BILLING. PANAMA'S JOINING THE NON-ALIGNED GROUP OF NATIONS WILL BE COMMENDED. TORRIJOS WILL COMMENT ON LATIN AMERICA'S QUEST FOR REAL NATIONAL AND ECONOMIC INDEPENDENCE, ON RECENT LATIN INITIATIVES TO COORDINATE ON ECONOMIC MATTERS AND PLUMP FOR THE AMPHICTYONIC CONFERENCE. WE SHOULD EXPECT THAT DURING THE TRIP TORRIJOS WILL PRAISE CUBAN ACHIEVEMENTS IN RURAL HEALTH AND EDUCATION. IT HAS BEEN ANNOUNCED HERE THAT PANAMA INTENDS TO SIGN SOME FORM OF AGREEMENT WITH CUBA IN THE RURAL HEALTH FIELD, AND THAT THERE WILL BE SOME AGREEMENT TO EXCHANGE AGRICULTURAL EXPERTISE--CUBA TO ASSIST PANAMA'S SUGAR AND DAIRY INDUSTRIES, PANAMA TO RECIPROCATATE ON BANANAS. ANY SUCH AGREEMENTS WILL PROBABLY BE DEALT WITH IN A JOINT COMMUNIQUE. THE COMMUNIQUE WILL, WE ALSO BELIEVE, CALL FOR INCREASED BILATERAL COOPERATION IN AREAS OF ECONOMIC, SOCIAL AND CULTURAL RELATIONS. THIS IS OUR ESTIMATION OF THE "BOTTOM LINE".

6. OTHER CONSIDERATIONS. THE FOREGOING PARAGRAPH OUTLINES WHAT WE REGARD AS LIKELY TO OCCUR. WHAT ELSE TORRIJOS, AND HIS CUBAN HOSTS, MAY DO AND SAY IS LESS PREDICTABLE. HOW MODERATE OR OTHERWISE TORRIJOS' ACTIONS AND STATEMENTS WILL BE WILL DEPEND ON THE GOALS AND PRESSURES DISCUSSED ABOVE. SEVERAL EMBASSY SOURCES HAVE SAID THAT TORRIJOS DOES NOT INTENT TO LAMBAST THE UNITED STATES, OR TO ESPOUSE ANY THIRD WORLD CAUSE PARTICULARLY NOXIOUS TO THE UNITED STATES. THAT TORRIJOS DESIRES MAXIMUM PUBLICITY FROM HIS VISIT, BOTH IN PANAMA AND ABROAD, IS CLEAR FROM HIS INVITATIONS TO NEWS CORRESPONDENTS DAVID BINDER (NEW YORK TIMES),

JEREMIAH O'LEARY (WASHINGTON STAR), MICHAEL THARP (WALL STREET JOURNAL), AND POSSIBLY OTHER PROMINENT U.S. NEWSMEN TO ACCOMPANY HIM. THERE WILL BE ALSO, OF COURSE, A PHALANX OF PANAMANIAN REPORTERS ALONG.

7. POSSIBLE GAIN. DESPITE ADVERSE EFFECTS OF THIS VISIT IN THE UNITED STATES, EMBASSY BELIEVES THAT THER MAY BE ONE PLUS TO TRIP. IF TORRIJOS JUDGES HIS STANDING ENHANCED AND HIS LEFTIST DOMESTIC CRITICS TEMPORARILY APPEASED, HIS SELF-CONFIDENCE WILL BE BOLSTERED. THIS FACTOR MAY THEN STRENGTHEN
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HIS WILL AND ABILITY TO CONTINUE MANAGING HIS END OF THE NEGOTIATIONS AND TO DEFEND HIS COMPROMISES IN THEM.
JORDEN UNQTE ROBINSON

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Message Attributes

Automatic Decaptioning: X
Capture Date: 26 AUG 1999
Channel Indicators: n/a
Current Classification: UNCLASSIFIED
Concepts: TOSEC, INTELLIGENCE ASSESSMENTS, CHIEF OF STATE VISITS
Control Number: n/a
Copy: SINGLE
Draft Date: 31 DEC 1975
Decaption Date: 01 JAN 1960
Decaption Note:
Disposition Action: RELEASED
Disposition Approved on Date:
Disposition Authority: GolinoFR
Disposition Case Number: n/a
Disposition Comment: 25 YEAR REVIEW
Disposition Date: 28 MAY 2004
Disposition Event:
Disposition History: n/a
Disposition Reason:
Disposition Remarks:
Document Number: 1975STATE305628
Document Source: ADS
Document Unique ID: 00
Drafter: ARA/PAN:ENADEAU
Enclosure: n/a
Executive Order: 11652 GDS
Errors: n/a
Film Number: D750452-0093
From: STATE
Handling Restrictions: n/a
Image Path:
ISecure: 1
Legacy Key: link1975/newtext/t19751291/baaaadfg.tel
Line Count: 236
Locator: TEXT ON-LINE, TEXT ON MICROFILM
Office: ORIGIN ARA
Original Classification: CONFIDENTIAL
Original Handling Restrictions: n/a
Original Previous Classification: n/a
Original Previous Handling Restrictions: n/a
Page Count: 5
Previous Channel Indicators:
Previous Classification: CONFIDENTIAL
Previous Handling Restrictions: n/a
Reference: n/a
Review Action: RELEASED, APPROVED
Review Authority: GolinoFR
Review Comment: n/a
Review Content Flags:
Review Date: 08 SEP 2003
Review Event:
Review Exemptions: n/a
Review History: RELEASED <08 SEP 2003 by KelleyW0>; APPROVED <19 NOV 2003 by GolinoFR>
Review Markings:

Margaret P. Grafeld
Declassified/Released
US Department of State
EO Systematic Review
06 JUL 2006

Review Media Identifier:
Review Referrals: n/a
Review Release Date: n/a
Review Release Event: n/a
Review Transfer Date:
Review Withdrawn Fields: n/a
Secure: OPEN
Status: NATIVE
Subject: n/a
TAGS: PFOR, OVIP, PN, CU, (TORRIJOS HERRERA, OMAR)
To: SECRETARY
Type: TE
Markings: Margaret P. Grafeld Declassified/Released US Department of State EO Systematic Review 06 JUL 2006